1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

Introduction

In September, 1948, I was appointed to undertake anthropological research in Sarawak under the auspices of the Colonial Social Science Research Council. The Secretary of the Colonial Social Science Research Council laid down as follows the nature of my research work: "a study of a traditionally based, stable, Iban community based on shifting dry rice cultivation and not subject to undue land shortage . . . . as described in 'A Report on the Possibilities of a Social Economic Survey of Sarawak,' by Dr. E. R. Leach".[1]

I arrived in Sarawak in January, 1949, and remained in the Colony until June, 1951. For most of this period I was working among the Iban of the Baleh region of the Kapit District of the Third Division. Our base camp was at Rumah Nyala in Sungai Sut, but field research was carried on in many other parts of the Baleh region—particularly in the headwaters of the Mujong. Visits were also made to Iban communities of the lower, middle and upper Rejang, the Katibas and Ngemah (in the Third Division), and of the Saribas and Ulu Batang Ai (in the Second Division). In studying agriculture many months were spent living on Iban farms, and this report is based on intensive first-hand observation; all of my investigations were carried on in the Iban language.

The Iban (or Sea Dayaks) belong to an ethnic stock which Haddon has called Proto-Malay. In brief, they are a brachycephalic people (average C. I. 83) of short stature (average height 5ft. 2½ins.), with black, lank hair and cinnamon coloured skin. Iban culture is basically proto-Malayan in type. Howell, our greatest authority on the Iban language, had no hesitation in classing it as "a dialect of the wide spreading Malay language." However, it is a dialect which has become intermixed with words borrowed from the various Borneo tribes with which the Iban have come into contact. Again, the Iban language, although it does contain a number of words that are Sanskrit in origin, has not been influenced by Arabic as have the languages of the peninsular Malays and the Menangkabau of Sumatra.

In Sarawak to-day, the Iban are the predominant element in a highly heterogeneous population. The total population of Sarawak as disclosed by the census of 1947 was 546,385, and of this number 190,326 (or 34·8%) were Iban. The past century has been for the Iban an era of expansion and they are now scattered over most of the interior zone of Sarawak—from the Samarahan river in the First Division to the Limbang river in the Fifth Division, about four hundred miles away to the north-east. However, the main concentrations of Iban population are to be found in the Second and Third Divisions.

Formerly, all of the Iban of Sarawak were shifting cultivators growing their *padi* on hillside clearings in the tropical rain-forest. To-day, there are a number of Iban communities (particularly in the lower reaches of the Lupar, Saribas and Rejang rivers) who derive their livelihood from the cultivation of wet *padi* in

[1]Leach, E. R., "Social Science Research in Sarawak," Colonial Research Studies No. 1, London, 1950.

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

THE FAMILY SYSTEM OF THE IBAN OF BORNEO

By J. D. FREEMAN

INTRODUCTION

The Iban[1]—with whose family system this essay is concerned—are a people of western Borneo. They are to be found, for the most part, among the remote, jungle-covered ranges of the undeveloped interior zone of Sarawak, and also in certain of the inaccessible headwaters of the great Kapuas river, in what is now Kalimantan or Indonesian Borneo.

In the judgement of A. C. Haddon, the Iban are Oceanic Mongols, and they belong to an ethnic stock which he has termed Proto-Malay (Haddon and Start 1936: 1). In brief, they are a brachycephalic people (average C.I. 83), of short stature (average height of males, 5 ft. 2½ in.), with lank, black hair, cinnamon coloured skins, and typically Mongoloid features.

Iban culture is also fundamentally proto-Malayan in type. In particular, the Iban language has many close affinities with Malay, and Howell, a leading authority, classes Iban as 'a dialect of the wide spreading Malay language'. The Iban language has not, however, been influenced by Arabic; nor have Iban culture and social institutions been appreciably affected by Islam.

In Sarawak today, the Iban are the predominant element in a highly heterogeneous population. The total population of Sarawak as disclosed by the census of 1947 was 546,385, and of this number 190,326 (or 34·8 %) were Iban. Sarawak, like so many of the other countries of south-east Asia, has a plural society. Along the coast, among the deltaic swamps and in the low-lying country bordering the tidal reaches of the rivers, one finds the main centres of Malay, Chinese and Melanau settlement. Further inland, amid steep and tangled ranges drained by swift-flowing streams and rivers, live the indigenous hill peoples: the Land Dayaks, the Iban, the Kayan, the Kenyah, the Kajang and others, all of them with subsistence economies based on the shifting cultivation of dry rice.

In particular, this essay is concerned with the Ulu Ai Iban of the Baleh river of the Third Division of Sarawak. The Baleh enters the great Rejang river, from the west, at a point about 170 river miles from the sea, and along its banks and those of its numerous tributaries (the Sut, Mujong, Gat and Merirai being the most important of them), there are scattered some 133 Iban communities with a total population of about 11,500. Almost all of these

147 sis or septal patency. In no case was the exercise tolerance test impaired. It is quite possible that some apical systolic murmurs 164 denoted early mitral valve lisions that might progress to stenosis. The absence of indisputable rheumatic carditis was very noteworthy in view of the fact that otitis media was moderately common and as both are closely related to streptococcal throat infections.

164 I am indebted to Dr. T. Wilson of the Institute for Medical Research, Kuala Lumpur and Capt. J. Bolton R.A.M.C. who carried out blood survey on the Sarawak Rangers when they reached Malaya for the following figures giving the incidence of filariasis.

Second Division

	Number examined.	*Cases of filariasis.*	%
Simanggang	27	9	33
Lubok Antu	80	0	0
Engkilili	10	2	20
Third Division			
Kapit	148	8	5.4
Song	59	0	0
Kanowit	48	5	10

I found two cases of early elephantiasis of the scrotum but was unable to confirm them microscopically.

Quite as interesting as the diseases found were the diseases not found that might have been expected. No leprosy was encountered. Only two men appeared slightly anaemic despite the amount of hookworm infestation that is prevalent in the East. [732] Physical deformities like kyphosis, scoliosis and limb shortening due to fractures were striking by their absence. Only three cases had muscle wasting that might have been attributable to poliomyelitis or encephalitis. No hydroceles or varicoceles were met with, yet in the U.K. about one in twenty males have varicoceles. Only one man had an inguinal hernia—a common condition among English recruits. Veneral disease is hard to diagnose without laboratory aid; one primary chancre was seen but no other manifestation of syphilis. Gonorrhoea (as diagnosed by visible deposit in the urine) was absent. [140] But V.D. is notoriously easy to conceal. None of the numerous vitamin deficiency diseases were seen.

● 141 *Height and Weight.* The average heights of recruits at the various towns were as follows:—

		Number
Kanowit	63.9 inches	53
Simanggang	63.4 "	33
Song	63.3	93
Kapit	63.4	205
Engkilili	63.1	15

9: Griffith D-5 (1953) 1955 OC6 Iban OC6

and the general average 63.45 inches. These figures are all a little too high because of the selection by the recruiting officers and I would estimate the right correction to be a reduction of 0.2 or 0.3 inches.

In 1901 A. C. Haddon F.R.S. did a survey of the physical characteristics of the Ibans in all areas and found the average height to be 62.7 inches. Dr. Haddon examined 56 Ibans and with this comparatively small number it is not justified to compare the two averages through the age distribution was roughly the same.

The average weights were:—Song 126 lbs. Simanggang 119. 5 lbs. Engkilili 115 lbs. In other districts the scales used were found to be inaccurate so invalidating the results. The average weight is 120 lbs for a man of 25 years.

Palangs. A palang is a piece of bone transfixing the glans penis and usually passing through the urethra. Its purpose is to give the wife greater satisfaction in sexual intercourse. Many primitive people use similar devices. At first I kept no records of their prevalence but my recollection is that in Kapit area 30-40% had them or had perforations for them (perhaps having politely removed them for medical examination.), In Song 1 in 46 in Lubok Antu 2 in 105 and Simanggang and Engkilili none at all. Of those that had palang most were made of bone, but some had slivers of rattan curling up at both ends and others were of wood or brass. The incidence of palangs corresponds very well with my impression of the type of men, i.e those from Kapit still retaining their long hair, multiple tattoos and the sirat instead of European shorts and trousers and being altogether less influenced by civilisation.

Another characteristic of the less westernised Ibans was their extreme shyness in exposing their sexual organs whether wearing palangs or not.

During my tour I spent some time living in long-houses and going round hospital wards in the two Divisions and found that the pattern of disease I saw differed little from what I had found examining recruits.

Naturally a casual observer sees nothing of the mortality among infants nor can he assess the mortality and morbidity among the Ibans. But my impression after examining more than 500 of them is that the health of recruits is extremely good and compares very favourably with National Servicemen in England.

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